

*Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the
Rural District of Leeds (Roundhay and Seacroft) for
the twelve months ended December 31st, 1904.*

The gross number of deaths registered in the district during the past year, 1904, is seventy-six : I have received notice also of two other deaths, one each to be reckoned against Roundhay and Seacroft respectively, making a gross total of seventy-eight. Of these seventy-eight twenty-two belong to Roundhay, sixteen to Seacroft, and forty to the Manston Fever Hospital, all of whom were foreign patients, none being of the resident staff. Furthermore, three of the Roundhay deaths were of non-residents who drowned themselves in the Park Lake, which seems to possess an attraction for non-residents who contemplate suicide that it appears to lack to the native.

The population of Roundhay up to the middle of last year was probably about 2,200 ; of Seacroft about 1,150 ; of the Leeds Fever Hospitals about 300 ; equal altogether to 3,650. The gross death-rate therefore comes to 21.9, a figure which very much overstates the real facts. The deaths belonging actually to Roundhay and Seacroft, as will have been seen, are only thirty-five ; allowing 150 for the permanent inmates of the Hospital, the staff, who must be reckoned in with the Seacroft population, the real death-rate is 10.8. As for the individual parts of our district Roundhay shows a rate (corrected) of 8.6 per thousand, Seacroft of 12.3. Of the Roundhay deaths, it may be added, three were of people well over seventy years of age, and two of over eighty.

The births are in all sixty-seven, thirty-three in Roundhay, thirty-four in Seacroft. The birth-rates per thousand of the population are respectively : for the whole population 19.1 ; for Roundhay 15, for Seacroft 26 per thousand ; another illustration of the marked difference, elsewhere to be observed, between the birth-rates of a commercial and of a working-class community.

The deaths under one year were in Roundhay, three ; in Seacroft, five ; the total infantile mortality per thousand born is thus at a rate of 119. Separated, they are : for Roundhay, 90.9 ; for Seacroft, 147.

There were no deaths from tuberculosis in Seacroft ; in Roundhay there was one, viz. :—pulmonary tuberculosis. The phthisis death rate for the district is therefore .27 per thousand ; for Roundhay, .4. The zymotic rate is 1.09 for the whole district : .9 for Roundhay, 1.8 for Seacroft.

Of the ten years during which I have been Medical Officer, this is first in which the gross total of deaths in Seacroft has been actually less than that of Roundhay ; further, the death-rate comes nearer to that of Roundhay than I have yet known it. It will indeed be seen on reference to column 13 of Table No. 1 (L.G.B. forms) that the average (corrected) death-rate has been decreasing in the district from year to year during the last five years. More especially is this the case with Seacroft in the case of adult deaths, the average of which has steadily fallen the last seven years. The fall in the average is not quite so marked in the case of Roundhay, inasmuch as the rate was a good deal better to

begin with, but it is still observable. Part of the decrease may well be accidental ; I am persuaded that in Seacroft it is partly due to the relief of overcrowding of houses, which is again due partly to the fact that while the family stocks do not change much, many of the younger members of families have grown up to the age at which they set up homes of their own, of many instances of which I am personally aware ; and partly due to improvements which have taken place in the last ten years, notably in the case of what was the slum of Seacroft, the houses namely in Philip's Fold on the Green. But it is reasonable to believe that another and considerable factor in the improvement is due to the efforts of the Council towards the better treatment of sewage and refuse in the district, namely, in the systematic and more frequent cleansing of privies and ashpits, and latterly in the improvement of the drainage. For while the popular notion that epidemics of infectious disease depend on the presence of decomposing filth is incorrect ; while such matter can never be more than a predisposing cause, a fit soil to grow those special disease germs—and they are not many—which flourish in the presence of putrefaction, there is no doubt that to that cause is due an impaired resistance to disease of any kind, which leads to a high sickness rate, and therefore to a high death-rate.

This brings me to a complaint that is frequently made to me of the smell arising from the ventilating grates of the sewers both in Roundhay and Seacroft. I have certainly noticed illnesses which seemed to be due to that cause in both localities, and one death in Roundhay, this past year, of an infant was referred to that cause, the child having had in the course of its daily airing to pass very near to an offensive air-hole close by its house. We are habitually taught that sewers need very abundant aeration ; in the case of the Seacroft sewer I cannot see, even if the theory be correct, that in the village itself there is need for any provision of the kind. The length of the main, before it reaches a point at which it can be oxygenated without fear of offence, is not more than half-a-mile. There is a good fall and a smooth surface to the inside of the channel. Unless there is stagnation in the sewer, which is unlikely, or unless you have the houses in direct connection, which is not the case, there is little or no chance of a nuisance resulting, and it seems to me that there is everything to gain by closing the ventilators in the village. Smell from a sewer does not necessarily mean accumulation of sewer gas, but is commonly due to an inevitable fouling of the surface : surely the proper place for such a smell is the sewer itself and not the outer air. The sewers of Roundhay are, it is true, much longer, but they have as good or better fall with as little chance of stagnation of current : if there is accumulation of sewer gas it comes from the Leeds sewers with which some of the more important are continuous. That might well be left for the ventilators of Leeds to get rid of ; at least, we need not ventilate near houses. It would not be a leap in the dark ; Bristol and Clifton have no ventilating grate from end to end, as its Medical Officer informs me, with the happy result that the inhabitants only complain in times of drought, when the water gullies dry up, an event which, if the orthodox theory is correct, ought to cause no anxiety, for at such a time oxygenation will be freer than ever. Indeed, it is difficult to see the rationale of any seal to the gullies at all in normal times if the diffusion of sewer gas is a consummation to be wished.

The whole district is, I believe, without exception in the populated parts sewered, with the exception of the group of houses on Cross Gates Green. For that we have to wait, for pecuniary reasons ; but the conditions that obtain in that corner are very far from sanitary, and I trust that all the houses will very soon be joined up. In other parts a few houses remain to be connected.

The Sewerage Works have been in operation during the past year. The filtrate is of very good quality, and the beds work well. I have seen no justification for the allegations urged against it at the Leeds Extension Enquiry : there has always been a quite singular absence of offensive smell whenever I have been there.

There has been, as will appear from the table presented to you, a marked absence of contagious disease in the district this year past. The extension of the Leeds Fever Hospital having been completed, our arrangement for beds in that Institution now becomes operative.

The dairy farms registered in the district are twenty-six in number. Of all that number there is only one with which one can reasonably find fault as regards structure and want of drainage: the one which the Leeds witnesses, in the enquiry of February last, adduced as evidence that they had inadequate control over their milk service. To begin with it should never have been allowed to be on the register, for there is only one small field attached, and no other grazing land than common rights afford. Secondly, the buildings, apart from the cowshed, are dilapidated. Thirdly, it is neither drained nor drainable, except at very great outlay. For all that, inside it is not badly kept; the way in which the liquid manure is absorbed by the absorbent bedding they use for the purpose has entirely baffled my expectations, and with a somewhat importunate supervision the yard outside is kept in fairly good order.

The chief difficulty I find with the dairy farms is to impress the farmers with the necessity for a surgical cleanliness in all their dealings with the cows' udders and with the milk. It is very hard for men trained in the ordinary farmers' school to understand the mischief that microscopic dirt may produce, or still more what they call "clean dirt." Undoubtedly the best way of ensuring this cleanliness is, I think, the education of the consumer until he understands what he should have and insists on having it properly treated. There has been no case of tuberculosis among cows that has come to my knowledge, either from observation or report.

The slaughter houses, as before, are four in number. They are all reasonably well kept; though as I have had occasion to remark before, two are makeshifts; the other two are structurally fitted for the purpose.

The water supply is adequate throughout the district, save that I have recently found two cottages depending on rain water collected in a tank, where there is a decided risk of contamination.

The workshops are four in number, all in Roundhay: two millinery shops, and two bakehouses. Of the latter, one is underground, but has been licensed by you. The conditions are just such as they were when I advised you to approve of its continuance; it is wholly domestic at present, but the owners contemplate taking an apprentice. The other bakehouse, with its recent alterations, is also unexceptionable; it is almost "domestic," there being only a boy employed there beyond the members of the family. Of the millinery establishments one is new: the workroom is at the top of the house over the shop—a good airy room for two workers, a woman and a girl of fourteen. There is no fault to find with it. The other one is that which I reported to you, last year, as being underground. It has been transferred to the third storey, and the number of workers increased to seven, all young women over sixteen years of age. The room is of nearly 3,600 feet cubical area, and is open at one end to two staircases, one to an upper room, the other going to an outer door downstairs. It is warmed by a coal fire and lighted by electric light. This month, February, the number of workers has been increased to nine. Though air space is sufficient during ordinary work-time to satisfy legal requirements, practically the air is not good, and I have ordered either the fixing of a permanently open ventilator, or the removal of some of the women into another room.

There is one "workplace" also underground, beneath a plumber's shop, but it is only very occasionally used for cutting glass, and no comment is necessary.

B. G. M. BASKETT, M.B., OXON.

